The Clerical Attitude Toward Comprehensiveness

An Address at the Church Club of Pennsylvania
April 10th, 1916

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ON THE ASSIGNED THEME

"What is hindering the greater advance of our Church? Is it the Attitude of our Clergy?"

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What is hindering the growth of our Church? Is it the attitude of the clergy?

THE kind of patriotism that maintains that America leads the world in science and letters, and that the United States can "thrash" any other nation on the globe is not the kind of patriotism that helps our country either to achieve distinction in science or literature, or to protect adequately the lives or property of its citizens. Neither is the Churchmanship which asserts dogmatically that the clergy of our Church, ordained as they are by bishops in the historic line, are, and from the nature of the case must be, the superiors of any Protestant ministers, the kind of Churchmanship whose counsels will help us to solve our problems.

That the historic Church of the English-speaking people should carry on its communicant rolls only about one per cent. of our population calls for anxious searchings of heart. Though we have had prejudices to overcome, we have also possessed unique advantages. Assuredly it is entirely wholesome to consider together whether there is anything in the attitude of our clergy that impedes our progress.

We are looking for things to correct, and not for things worthy of praise. Criticism, and not laudation, is the duty of the hour. Whatever criticisms I shall utter, permit me to say, will be expressed in a spirit of loyalty to the Church, and of fraternity with my brethren. While I believe that all the Lord's people are priests, nevertheless I feel a peculiar bond uniting me with my brethren in the ministry. I know with what unworldly devotion to high ideals, and amid what privations and cares many of them minister to their people. No church in the world has such pastors, such parish visitors, such faithful ministrants to

the sick and poor as are found in the Church of England, and in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. From our Mother Church, with her parish-system, we inherited a noble conception of the responsibilities of the pastoral office, and we have faithfully continued the splendid tradition.

Neither has any Church better organizers, or more skillful handlers of the machinery of a parish. We are easily leaders along this line, and in institutional activities. No fault can be found with our clergy for their attitude toward public worship or the importance of enlisting the arts in the service of God. No ministers of any church know more about music and architecture, or attach greater importance to a dignified and reverent worship of God in appropriate buildings consecrated to His service.

I shall not discuss the question whether we are equally well equipped with general culture and theological learning; the attitude and not the equipment of the clergy is our theme. I think it must be admitted, however, that we have not attached a due measure of importance to the power of the preached word. A rector who boasted that he had taught his people not to care for sermons, is surely occupying a mistaken attitude in congratulating himself on this easy achievement. It is probable that we give too much of our strength to mere machinery, and do not prize sufficiently the weight that comes from massive learning and profound thought. Here we need the assistance of the laity, who ought to share more largely in the tasks of administration and the labor of collecting supplies for the distant fields. A clergyman needs time for reading and study, if his profiting is to appear to all.

But these characteristics are hardly what is intended by the phrase, "the attitude of the clergy." Some may think that the trouble with our Church is that the clergy do not occupy the right attitude toward one another; that they are not sufficiently brotherly and affectionate, and do not trust one another enough. I have heard remarks of that

kind. Of course, there is a measure of truth in them. None of us abound enough in love and good will. This is true in every department of life. Peace advocates need more kind feelings towards the advocates of preparedness, and the strenuous organizers of our nation's forces should have more tenderness for the idealism of the anti-preparedness folk. All of us need more kindly affection one to another.

But kindliness does not require that all theories should look alike to us. We must not ascribe to personal ill-will what may be due to zeal for truth. It will be an evil day for the Church when her ministers do not feel strongly interested in spreading the gospel as they understand it. All efforts to keep the peace by checking frank expression are mistakes. Let us debate questions at issue in the open like men. Let each advocate of moderation show his good sense by preaching restraint to the people of his own way of thinking. Criticisms of manner are only entirely in order from those who are in sympathy with the substance. Certainly nothing will be accomplished by a ritualist begging a broad Churchman to moderate his controversial ardor in the interest of brotherliness, or by a broad Churchman urging a ritualist to be less zealous for what he conceives as Catholic truth, or by men of vague beliefs beseeching others whose ships are bowling along with the strong wind of compelling purpose, under the clear sky of definite beliefs, to join them in the fog-bank, where they lie drifting about on the tides blowing their dreary fog-horns lest some moving craft should run into them.

A Church that comprehends many schools of thought must not seek to hold them by enervating and diluting their convictions; but must bear the pangs of Esau and Jacob contending in her womb, in the hope that in due time nations will be born. The trouble with our ministers is not any real deficiency in good will among the clergy of various schools. None of us would really injure a

brother, or cast contumely on the fallen. As a broad Churchman I have invited Ritualist after Ritualist to St. Stephen's. The trouble with our clergy is not ill-will, or malice, or personal animosity.

The real difficulty is undue sensitiveness. We mingle so much with the sick and poor and dependent, and see so much suffering that we are too highly developed emotionally. When theological and ecclesiastical themes are analyzed, we are a little too much shocked and pained. Instead of strengthening our grasp on the truth by considering and answering the arguments, there is a tendency to adopt the attitude that this strong and insistent advocate of other views is a troublesome disturber of the peace. Some people are weak enough to impute personal animus, as if there were no such passion as zeal for the truth. In this way awakeners of the half-asleep are often hustled into corners as destroyers of the Church's devotional spirit. The cure for this undue sensitiveness clearly does not lie in swathing us around with more soft bandages, but in toughening our nature. The true remedy is in frank, brave, good-natured discussion like this symposium. We gain nothing by begging everyone to keep the living issues of the day out of the Diocesan Convention, in order that purely routine business, much of which might be handed over to committees, may have the right of way. The only result will be, that it will be hard to secure lay delegates. If we are to have a representative system of government, Conventions should be composed of men who are interested in the problems of the Church's life, and instead of discussing these questions in coteries and secret conferences, or at long range in the church papers, we ought to debate them in the open, face to face, and gain strength and toughness from the bracing experience. Such questions as the change of our Church's name, the proper organization of the Colored Work, amendments to the Prayer Book, the policy of the Board of Missions, are the concern of the whole

Church, and we ought to consider them in our conventions, and discuss them frankly, without undue sensitiveness and certainly without any imputation of evil motives.

We need to take a lesson from the noblest incident in the history of South Carolina. When that impetuous State, under the influence of the theories of Calhoun, seceded from the Union, the most eminent lawyer in Charleston, Mr. Pettigru, a man of about sixty, publicly condemned the theory of secession as untenable, and solemnly protested in Church, in a dignified way, against the substitution in our Morning Prayer of the name of the President of the Confederacy for the name of the President of the United States. He maintained this attitude uncompromisingly till his death in 1863. Painful as his conduct must have been to his fellow citizens, they appreciated his loyalty to principle, employed his great learning and ability in the codification of their laws, and after his death placed a splendid marble bust of him in Charleston's City Hall, where it stands to-day, speaking as eloquently of the generosity and magnanimity of the South Carolinians who erected it, as of the leonine courage of the great Unionist and constitutional lawyer. We need such a spirit of courage and magnanimity in the Church. It would blow away the sickly miasma of a false sentimentality that tries to prevent men from speaking the truth as God gives them to understand the truth.

This magnanimity is required in abundant measure today because just now there is a great increase of controversy that certainly cannot be imputed to any personal oppositions. It has been borne in upon our Protestant ministers more and more, that there is a large, I fear increasing number of clergy in our Church whose attitude toward the Reformation platform is distinctly hostile and reactionary. In that great settlement the Church of England sought to reorganize herself on an entirely opposite principle from the theory that moulded the reconstruction of the Medieval Church at the Council of Trent, at about

the same time. (The Council of Trent lasted from 1545 to 1564—while the First Prayer Book of Edward VI was put forth in 1549 and the Articles were finally approved in 1571.)

In that famous Council the Roman Church, under the dominant influence of the Jesuits, endeavored to check the new learning and the new appreciation of the gospel, by setting forth Christian truth, as a closely interlocked system, a necklace of pearls all strung together so to speak, both by logic and the Church's authority. Anyone who denied a single authoritative teaching of the Church, broke the necklace and lost all the pearls. For example, if anyone denied that the Sacraments were seven, or that the whole Christ was contained in one species in the Lord's Supper, or that ordination imparted an indelible character, the Council of Trent decreed, *Anathema sit,* just as definitely as if he had impugned the Divinity of Christ. The Church had locked the truths of which she conceived herself to be the custodian, rather than the teacher, in the iron ring of a closed system. Worse than the rejection of any one truth, however powerfully it might speak to the conscience, was the rejection of the logical system and the Churchly authority that conserved the whole deposit of faith. Such was the Tridentine settlement under the Jesuit influence. How the poor Church of Rome has groaned with that iron fetter about her.

The Church of England took exactly the opposite course in its reconstruction. It set forth as the essentials of Christianity, not a closed system, but the simple truths of the Apostles' Creed, adding thereto as helpful though subordinate instruction, the teachings of the Catechism, and safeguarding itself from the presence in its ministry of any believers in the closed system of Rome by requiring its ministers to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles. By a judicious balancing between extremes these Articles endeavored to preserve the system of Calvin from

being presented as a closed system and opened the door to Arminians. The foundation of Christian truth rests, according to this Reformation theory, neither on Church authority nor on the logical demands of a system, but upon Holy Writ. Nothing was to be required of any man as an article of faith that could not be proven therefrom. Each statement, each article, was recognized to possess its own line of proof. Of course each gives some measurable corroborative support to the other, but it was not their linked connection and logical sequence, but their several bases in Scripture, and in the testimony of the heart that gave them credibility and standing. The Anglo-Saxon temper has always distrusted a closed system. It has too vivid a realization of our ignorance to deliver itself over bound hand and foot to formal logic. It knows that experience is a safer teacher than deduction from propositions. The children of the New Learning, to whom a new hemisphere had recently been revealed, among whom a Lord Bacon was soon to arise to teach with prevailing and fruitful eloquence the value of induction and experiment, had an instinctive sense that it was wise to leave open doors for discovery and for the entrance of new truths.

By this emphasis on essentials it was also hoped that everyone who believed in the Scriptures in any sense and in the Divinity of Jesus could be kept in the national Church. One of the causes of the break with the Papacy was a great development in the sense of nationality, which was soon to express itself in literature and countless ways. The great aim of all English statesmen at the Reformation was to keep all the people of the nation in one household of faith.

The great difficulty, of course, lay in the diversities of opinion about ordination. The solution of this problem was a masterpiece of that statesmanship which has made England so preëminent in the world. In practice the requirements of ancient precedent as to ordina-

tion were exacted, except in a few extraordinary cases. Sticklers for ancient usage found the ancient rules closely observed. No one should say there was any irregularity in the Church's orders. On the other hand the Church with the most significant reticence refused to declare that her methods were of Divine appointment, or were the only methods, the rank of a sacrament was denied to ordination, and belief in the Divine right of one form of church government was not included in the list of fundamentals. Indeed, many of the Church's chief theologians, the great Hooker among them, disclaimed the divine right theory. By this rigidity of practice and absence of theory, it was hoped that the whole Protestant population could worship together in a National Church.

We know that this statesmanlike settlement never had a fair trial; but like St. Paul's ship encountered fearful gales from various quarters, so that part of the crew left the ship and much of the cargo of liberality was cast overboard with disastrous results. Nevertheless the conviction has hitherto been common, or at least before Cardinal Newman's day it was common to all schools of thought in our Church, that this Reformation principle of unity in essentials and liberty in non-essentials was the true basic principle of a Church and in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament.

This was the old High Church view, in the sane days, when High Churchmanship had been schooled to moderation by the Non-jurors' heroic folly in ignoring the teachings of life. "What is all this talk about Apostolical Succession?" an old farmer asked stout High Church Bishop De Lancey. "Don't concern yourself about it," the Bishop replied; "it is a matter of Church politics." The good Bishop was a good Anglican. He did not hold this Tridentine selvedge-edge theory, that all these fundamental truths are like a robe that will unravel itself and frazzle out unless we hold certain views about bishops. He knew that God has not

left himself without witness in the human heart and that great truths which shine aloft like stars, can be trusted to manifest themselves if we turn men's gaze upward. He held the truly English view, the Protestant view, that the essentials carry the non-essentials and not the contrary. He did not believe that a particular doctrine of the Church was indispensable to the preservation of a belief in God.

Under a bishop of such a temper our theory of comprehension is workable. He could address a confirmation class without inculcating a theory of confirmation which is, indeed, held by the Church of Rome; but which, whether it be true or false, was not adopted by our Church at the Reformation and is not taught in our formularies. The things on which both parties agreed seemed to such men the essential things: viz., the benefits derived from prayer, from a public profession of allegiance to Jesus, and dedication to his service. The debatable nature of the benefit derived from the Bishop's hands could be left in the background, where it belongs, as the silence of our Church teaches and as reason teaches, since the benefit is certainly not dependent on a dogma about the rite; but upon faith in Jesus Christ.

It is a question in my mind, however, whether comprehension is workable if the Tridentine theory of a closed system gains the day. Men of that school are not willing to live and let live. The system bulks so large in their mind, that they cannot tolerate people who wish to envisage old truths in new ways. Their consciences clamor for rule of others. The Holy Cross Father will not speak at the Garrick, if cards of St. Stephen's, which bear a Presbyterian minister's name are distributed. If the Board of Missions sends conferees to Panama, Catholic champions on the Board resign their membership. Clergymen of this school are always presenting their peculiar views as the Church's official teaching and faulting the loyalty of those who do not accept them.

Men of this way of thinking are fundamentally opposed to the whole Reformation settlement. Their attitude is that the truths on which we agree are as ineffective as so many human limbs separated from the trunk, and can only live if linked together in a sacerdotal system which they call the Catholic Theology. They cannot endure the reverent and cautious reserves of our Church's teaching on obscure points. Their temper was exactly expressed by gifted Hugh Benson, the eloquent younger son of Archbishop Benson, who went over to the Church of Rome. In a friendly discussion held soon after his secession he exclaimed with evident satisfaction: "You see I belong to a Church which happens to know." At another time he said to his brother: "In the English Church you have to make up your mind on every single point. Why not make it up on one point, the authority of the Church and be done with it?" "Because," replied the elder, "I can't be dictated to on points, in which I feel that I have a right to an opinion." "Ah," answered Hugh, "that isn't faith." With him faith was submission to a Church, with a closed system. A church with an open system can tolerate such men in its ministry: the trouble is that these men cannot endure the Church with its reserves and its open system. They want to make it over after the Tridentine pattern. This is the basis of much of the clamor for Prayer Book revision. They are trying to set forth the Tractarian system on the authority of the Church.

The disaster that has followed in the train of this change of theological attitude can be seen all over our Church, where congregations have been disorganized and dissipated by rectors who in their loyalty to a closed system have insisted on teaching and symbolizing in worship theories that the congregation does not accept and which our Church has not formulated. High Churchmen, Low Churchmen, Broad Churchmen have been able to live to-

gether, not without debate, but with full acknowledgment of each other's lawful position in the Church—for all have been at one in their loyalty to the principle of Reformation, unity in essentials and liberty in non-essentials, the Church defining the essentials in her Creed and formularies. But what will be the result of the growth of this new school that asserts through innumerable publications, all characterized by extraordinary fondness for Roman Catholic phraseology and usages, that it alone expresses fully the mind of the Church, that Low Churchmen and Broad Churchmen are only tolerated deficients in doctrine, permitted by the Church's kind indulgence to officiate for a season at its altars? How can our Church grow if such a school flourishes among us, a school out of which numbers rush to Rome, if we recognize in the slightest way the gifts of God in the Protestant world? Is it not the part of wisdom, does it not make for ultimate peace to point out plainly that this attitude of this school is hostile to the whole spirit of our church?

If the doctrine of the Ministry occupies the central place that they ascribe to it, it ought to be as generally believed among us as the Fatherhood of God, of which according to one of their leaders, it is the necessary bulwark. It ought to be in the Creed and in the Catechism. I might go further and point out that if Christianity be a closed system of that nature, the Scriptures have failed to reveal the religion of Jesus. Certainly, according to the Gospels, he never taught such a system, neither can it be discovered in the writings of the Apostles. St. Paul held that Christian truth grew, as the knowledge of manhood superseded the childish systems of youth. Jesus said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now. Howbeit, when the Spirit of truth is come, he shall lead you into all truth." Holy Writ presents Christianity dynamically, not statically.

It would be interesting to indicate the sources of this purely static conception. It is enough to indicate here

that in a world that believes that God is still creating, and still revealing Himself, a static conception of truth is repugnant to our deepest convictions and most sacred experiences. No Church can long teach with persuasiveness, if it has ceased to learn. In my judgment the static theology of many of our clergy, who do not realize that God has caused new light to break forth out of his Word, is one of the things that need to be abandoned if our Church is to grow.

Perhaps the best way to secure a more vital conception of the truth among our ministers will be to raise our requirements of admission to Holy Orders. Too many men enter our ministry, as a profession, and accept our dogmas, in the same way that a lawyer accepts his law from the decision of the Supreme Court. All the teaching having been received on external authority, such scholars do not know what is meant by the inner witness. The Methodists admit freely men of prophetical gifts to their ministry, and try them out. The Presbyterians hold up the scholarly requirements and trust that none but those inwardly moved will have final perseverance. We have neither stressed the inward call like the Methodists, nor raised high the literary requirements, like the Presbyterians. As a result there are men in our ministry who have neither intellectually nor emotionally penetrated to the fountain-heads of truth. Simply loyal accepters of that which has been delivered to them by external authority, they stress all teachings alike. Having received it all on authority, their chief insistence is on the duty of intellectual submission. Such men lack the power to separate the essential from the non-essential. They may be thorough-going and faithful doers of the word, but they are not fitted to be prophets or teachers, and they inevitably tend to a static conception of religion. In some way or other we must bring men of prophetic gifts into the ministry, and train them according to their aptitudes.

I have spoken of a theological and ecclesiastical attitude

that interferes with our Church's progress. Let me now turn briefly to a social attitude. This is the age of democracy. More and more do we realize the oneness of humanity, and the dignity of manhood. In social life we refuse to mingle except on terms of equality. Feudalism, except in Germany, Austria and Russia, where its evils are manifest enough, is a thing of the past. A friend tells me that in the exclusive clubs of London, an English lord is not called by his title, but by his seat, or family name. The spirit of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity is blown abroad on every breeze. Our clergy need to insist less on ranks and degrees and orders, and think more in terms of human fellowship. "The Historic Episcopate locally adapted" is one of our watchwords. We need to carry out the adaptation. This country never has been able to stand prelacy, and never will. Prelates are doomed, like kings and barons. Our Episcopate must be shown to be a constitutional Episcopate, the agent, and not the master of the Church, deriving its authority from God through the living Church of the present, and not from the dead Church of the past. As the Society of the children of God, the Church is a body of free men, and the spirit of freedom ought to be felt swelling out the sails of all our enterprises. Men who are trying to adapt the Episcopate to American life, are not inimical to that order; they are its best friends. It is childish to think that they are animated by any personal antagonisms. They are simply anxious to make our Church truly American.

We clergy feel ourselves far too much a caste, and (pardon such plain speaking) are too jealous of our privileges. And the laity, out of good form as they think, treat us too much in that way. Above all, we are too much by taste and leanings the friends of the prosperous and cultured, and have therefore failed to bring into our churches the mechanic and the artisan. This aristocratic spirit breathes in our Catechism where the duty of submission to superiors is alone insisted upon, and the greater

obligation of kindness to those less advantaged is not pointed out, where the responsibility of citizenship is omitted, but humility and lowliness to betters is stressed. I am quite aware that the clergy minister most faithfully to the poor. But one of the most unselfish ministrants among the poor that I ever knew, who always came among them with tender sympathy for their physical needs and a yearning desire to gather them into the Church, showed an entire aloofness from all the aspirations for social betterment and for larger economic opportunity that make up so much of the life of the wage-earner. They were looked on simply as very plain people. A High Caste Brahmin who was converted to Christianity came to receive holy baptism, wearing the sacred thread which was the badge of his distinction, and entitled him as one of the twice-born, to special veneration from men of a lower caste. When he pronounced the words, "I renounce them all," he stripped off this sign of idolatrous preëminence, and trampled it under foot. We need to imitate that Brahmin and rid ourselves of those proud and exclusive feelings, that can hide themselves under the cassock of the priest, as well as under the uniform of the soldier.

I trust that in this discussion I have said nothing that will seem disloyal to my brethren. We are all one household, clergy and laity. As one brought up in a minister's home, well do I know the conditions of a minister's life. Poor though they may be, the minister and his family associate with the rich members of the parish. We find our close friends often in generous laymen who shower kindnesses on us. We learn from them how the world looks from the windows of a bank or a great corporation, or the sky-ward stories of a great law building. It is difficult to keep from sharing the class point of view of these kind friends, difficult to stand apart from them in spirit enough to enter into the experience of the striking street-car conductor, and of the

shirtwaist girls who have marched out to secure other conditions. But no man can be a prophet of God who is ruled by gregarious instincts. It is our duty to make a real effort to penetrate to the heart of these great moral and social questions. We must, like our Master, have compassion on the multitude, and rise above the class point of view. Above all we need to preach the Gospel of Jesus in its simplicity.

A young clergyman had as his second cure a Church in the suburbs of Cincinnati, right under the shadow of a great Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where a liberal interpretation had sweetened and modified the sterner tenets of the theology of Calvin, till nothing was left but a profound sense of the organic oneness of Humanity, and an optimistic belief that the Divine sovereignty would make the good to prevail. About two squares from the little frame Episcopal Church, with its small band of worshipers, and only moderately accomplished choir, was the great stone Presbyterian Church with its thronging crowds, splendid choir, and eloquent preacher. An influential and churchly member of the Episcopal congregation drew his young rector aside and said, "It is manifest that we can never build up our church in this community, unless you emphasize the peculiar features of the Episcopal Church, and differentiate yourself in worship as much as possible from the Protestants about us. Only thus can you grow, or indeed keep your flock." "Never," replied the young rector, "will I allow controversy so to change my emphasis in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or in seeking to extend His Kingdom. I never heard that a form of Church organization was the power of God unto salvation. I shall seek to uphold Jesus, and not this Church system." He was rewarded by seeing the little church well filled, though he was no orator. Students of the Theological Seminary were often seen in the back pews, attracted by a message in which neither the schoolmen of Romanism, nor of Protest-

antism were allowed to take the place of Jesus as the supreme teacher of His own religion.

Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

POSTSCRIPT.

In the discussion that ensued after this paper, it was intimated that while claiming to be a Broad Churchman I had not left room for any other school of thought in the Church. I think that a careful reading of my paper will show that such a statement is not justifiable. I am willing to live and let live, believing with Milton, that "they do ingloriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt" the power of truth. There is here no suggestion that High Churchmen, Low Churchmen, or Broad Churchmen are outside of the limits of our Church's comprehension. I expressly state that the Church tolerates men who prefer a closed system more after the Tridentine pattern than according to our Church's constitution. It can tolerate them legally and canonically; but I do ask the question whether they will allow the Church to remain as tolerant and comprehensive as it is, if they gain the upper-hand in our General Convention. Surely this is a fair subject of discussion. I doubt whether they can or will. Liberals are content to ground their teachings on evidence; but the children of the Oxford movement can not be satisfied unless they have had their peculiar views set forth by the authority of the Church. I venture the prediction that this school will attempt to fasten their theories on the Church in the revision of the Prayer Book.

A Bishop has the liberty of any other teacher of theology to spread abroad his views; but he has no right to represent them as the official teachings of our Church, if they

are not so set forth in our standards. He cannot come down into the arena as the mouthpiece of a certain school, and at the same time expect the sanctity of the lawn to be respected. He can't represent our Church as the hospitable home and future meeting point of those who believe the great essentials, whose *lex credendi* is the *lex orandi,* and then turn around on those who take their stand on these essentials and intimate that they are disloyal if they do not journey with him further in a certain direction, where to many people the dome of St. Peter's rises up beyond the towers of Oxford as the logical goal. In a word, our Church can not remain what it is, or become what it should become, if those who admire the closed system gain control. It is our bounden duty, if we wish to see its Protestant character maintained to examine the nature of the theories that are being promulgated in many quarters as the Church's official teaching, and to show how unlike they are in their narrow rigidity to the broad and liberal platform laid down in the spacious days of Great Elizabeth and how impossible their prevalence will make any large usefulness for our Church in the future into which God is leading us.